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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 5 July 1994, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. BUTLER (Australia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued) (E/1994/7, E/1994/8, E/1994/9, E/1994/16, E/1994/100, E/1994/L.12 and L.14)

The PRESIDENT informed the Council that the coordination segment would be devoted to the coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies, organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system relating to the achievement of the economic and social objectives of the United Nations. The themes for the session would be science and technology for development and international cooperation within the United Nations system against the illicit production, sales, demand, traffic and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. In its decision 1993/205, the Council had decided that the coordination segment would reach agreed conclusions containing specific recommendations on matters related to coordination.

Turning to the general segment, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/162, the Economic and Social Committees of the Council would be subsumed into the plenary. After consultations, agreement had been reached on a new approach to the conduct of the Council's work under the general segment that would focus, in so far as possible, on action and on the taking of decisions. Therefore, it was proposed that there should be no general debate for that segment and that speakers' lists for the individual clusters of items would not be maintained. With respect to items on which there had been no previous debate in another body or to new items, it was understood that delegations might wish to enter into the debate on that subject prior to Council action.

Ms. VOLKOFF (Canada) suggested that some meetings could be devoted to an informal discussion of HIV/AIDS.

The PRESIDENT said he would take it that the Council wished to approve its programme of work for the substantive session of 1994 as contained in E/1994/L.12, as orally revised.

It was so decided.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued) (A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/1994/91, E/1994/34, parts I, II and III, E/1994/35, E/1994/64 and Add.1 and 2, E/1994/84, E/1994/93)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to continue its consideration at the working level of operational activities for international cooperation for development.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom) said that his delegation had seen only one completed country strategy note, the note for Thailand. Its excellence underlined the value of the process. It would be interesting to have an idea of how many country strategy notes would be completed before the triennial review.

Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) said that the most important point before the Council was the preparation of the triennial policy review of operational activities, to take place in 1995. Accordingly, among the many elements of the report of the Secretary-General (E/1994/64), the Council should concentrate on four areas: feedback and evaluation, the practical problems of the programme approach, the role of agencies in national execution and the leadership of resident coordinators. An analysis of the regional dimension would be required in order to gain a clear view of the problems. The Council's resolution on that item should take into account the practical ways in which the Secretariat could provide information to supplement the Secretary-General's report.

Mr. COSTA (Brazil) said that the country strategy note was a very useful instrument for coordination at the field level. His delegation had some questions regarding its implementation, however. Many delegations had advocated the rapid preparation of the largest possible number of country strategy notes, but he wondered whether any attention had been paid to

harmonizing those notes with the programming cycles of the several agencies involved.

Mr. HAEMMERLI (Chief, Operational Activities for Development Unit, Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that the Secretariat had not established quantitative targets but had communicated information regarding the country strategy note to the field, where it had received a strong response. It was very well aware of the need to harmonize the notes with programming cycles. The Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) had established working groups on the relationship between programming and country strategy note cycles.

As for the number available before the triennial review, just under 60 country strategy notes had been initiated. Seven were in an advanced drafting stage, and one had been completed. He estimated that between 10 and 20 would be completed before the 1995 triennial policy.

Miss POLLACK (United States of America) said that the point raised by the representative of the United Kingdom was quite useful, since even preliminary information would be helpful during the triennial review. She also appreciated the suggestion of the representative of Colombia that the field of analysis should be narrowed, perhaps to the regional level. She would be interested to hear further discussion on the country strategy note as a framework for other kinds of donor assistance. It could be a useful model for bilateral assistance, for instance.

Mr. LUNDBORG (Observer for Sweden) said that the country strategy note was the most important outcome of the previous tripartite review. It was both a tool and a process, and the process in itself was important. The Council needed to know more about the problems with that process, however, and its advantages and difficulties should be identified. An exploration of the reasons for any failures would be particularly important.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom) said that his delegation would like to hear from the representative of the funds and programmes about the

prospects that the country strategy note would lead to a more integrated programming process.

Mr. YAO Wenlong (China) said that China had been active in supporting the adoption of General Assembly resolution 47/199, which had required recipient countries to work out a country strategy note on their development needs so that the United Nations could respond in a timely manner. During the current debate on that topic, however, it had appeared that some delegations understood the country strategy note to be a United Nations common strategy, which was not exactly true. In his delegation's view, the country strategy note should be the choice of the recipient country, and that the process should in all cases be originated by the Government of the recipient country. The United Nations could coordinate the process and provide support but should not replace the recipient Government in any respect. His delegation would welcome the opportunity to study further the guidance elements for the preparation of country strategy notes.

Mr. ALTESMAN (UNICEF) said, in reply to the representative of Sweden, that the problems with the country strategy note could be generalized to problems of cooperation between United Nations agencies at the strategic level. The country strategy note was just one mechanism among many, and no single mechanism could respond to all development needs.

Some of the problems lay in the fact that strategy involvement was new to some parts of the United Nations system, as their previous involvement had been entirely at the project level. During the 1980s, there had been a shift from a project approach to a programme approach. The Bretton Woods institutions, for example, had made that shift successfully, but the United Nations system lacked prior experience in that area. That approach was also new at the political level. The United Nations was still learning how to support Governments at the strategic level in an appropriate way. The United Nations system had no mandate for conditionality and must also avoid replicating work done by other development agents. It was in the process of developing its own model for such interventions.

Replying to the representative of the United States, he suggested that an end-of-the-year review would show the extent to which outside partners participated. The review might be conducted through the machinery of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). His preliminary assessment was that other international partners might participate in the country strategy note (CSN) process in such areas as national planning, priority-setting and budgetary mechanisms. If programming cycles were harmonized, the support provided by the country strategy note to national planning efforts would automatically establish a linkage with all international donors. Although they did not cover bilateral assistance from the Bretton Woods institutions, country strategy notes could provide guidance to Governments in their relationships with other international partners, for example, with some of the consultative groups or round tables, or to the World Bank initiative on poverty assessment.

Replying to the representative of the United Kingdom, he said that the recent deliberations of the UNICEF Executive Board had illustrated that unless governmental input into individual country programmes was provided in the early stages, it would not significantly alter the content of those programmes. Although a single common review would negate the benefits of a division of labour, some time might be devoted to reviewing common elements of different country programmes and focusing on interactions among the agencies. For example, the nutrition or poverty dimensions of the country programmes of the World Food Programme might overlap with the work of UNICEF.

Mr. MADDHEUS (United Nations Development Programme), replying to the representative of the United Kingdom, mentioned recent efforts at common programming in a number of countries. In India, all country programmes had been reviewed separately but simultaneously, and there had been a common segment at the beginning and end of the exercise. A collaborative programme review exercise had also been carried out in Sri Lanka. In the Central African Republic, technical cooperation had been assessed as part of a comprehensive exercise involving all the organizations of the United Nations

system. Consideration had also been given to including the country strategy note, together with an analysis of the role of the United Nations system in the country concerned, as a common first chapter of each agency's country programme.

Replying to the representative of Sweden, he said that one problem which could be analysed in the next triennial policy review was certain countries' reluctance to assign their limited human resources to the elaboration of a country strategy note when United Nations operational activities represented but a tiny fraction of their development assistance. Lastly, replying to the representative of the United States, he said that UNDP, in reviewing all of its processes, including country programmes, was also evaluating its role in round-table meetings and consultative groups for technical cooperation. That might be a potential linkage between the country strategy note and the larger donor coordination mechanisms.

Ms. MESA (World Food Programme), replying to the representatives of Sweden and the United States, said that WFP viewed the country strategy note as an opportunity to integrate food aid with technical and financial assistance provided by other sources. While acknowledging that that would facilitate joint funding, she expressed concern that the formal institution of the country strategy note might actually slow down such integration, which was currently taking place on an informal, ad hoc basis. As the representative of UNDP had pointed out, designing a country strategy note required considerable effort on the part of recipient Governments.

Mr. ANDO (United Nations Population Fund), replying to the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom, said that the country strategy note provided a broader framework for UNFPA programme activities. It also helped the Fund to view population issues and its own performance in a comprehensive manner and to develop comprehensive population assistance programmes for developing countries. Replying to the representative of Brazil, he agreed that the country strategy note should be harmonized with the recipient country's development plan. In that connection,

at the most recent session of the UNFPA Executive Board, no country programme had been submitted for individual Arab States, in an effort to harmonize the country programme exercise with the development plans of all the countries in that region. Replying to the representative of Sweden, he said that one problem associated with the country strategy note had become evident in the recent training session held at the International Labour Organization Centre at Turin, Italy, namely, that national plans lacked clear priorities and goals relating to sectoral or thematic issues.

Mr. HAEMMERLI (Chief, Operational Activities for Development Unit, Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), replying to the representative of Sweden, said that one problem, alluded to by the Executive Director of UNICEF the week before, was that it took time for innovations to become firmly established. The Department had had to develop mechanisms that were consistent with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/199, which had been drafted in consensus language. The results of the workshop held at Turin, resolution 47/199 and the ACC agreement published in 1993 had provided a framework for such mechanisms.

It had become clear from discussions with operational activities staff in 11 countries that organization would be almost as vital as content. It had originally been thought that such organization would require six months, but in fact it would probably take about one year. In order to respond to the many questions which had arisen, the Department hoped to institute a regular review process after the first country strategy notes were submitted.

Responding to the representative of the United States, he said that an analysis in anticipation of the next triennial policy review should focus primarily on linkages with national planning efforts, and those between United Nations organizations globally and at the country level. If content was analysed at all, it should be done in the context of the country programme concerned, in order to identify linkages between the framework provided by the country strategy note and the country programme. It was vital to ensure that recipient Governments were completely involved in any analysis undertaken and

that the analysis highlighted the linkages between the country strategy note as a tool of coordination at the national level. That applied both to completed country strategy notes and to those which were near completion.

Replying to the representative of China, he stressed that the country strategy note process was country-driven and that no steps would be taken without the recipient Government's full consent and participation. The guidelines distributed the week before were fully consistent with the provisions of paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 47/199. In certain cases, the process had been initiated on the basis of texts which had preceded that resolution. Perhaps that had given rise to some confusion.

Mrs. AMERASEKAR (Sri Lanka) stressed that the country strategy note would be successful only if the recipient Government perceived it as an instrument which reflected its own development priorities and which was in harmony with its national development plan. The initiative in preparing a country strategy note must come from the recipient Government, since otherwise it would feel that a requirement was being imposed on it from the outside. Some countries did not have the expertise to prepare country strategy notes or had already committed their limited human resources to other development plans. An expert should be assigned to those countries in order to help them prepare the country strategy note. The priorities specified for UNDP programmes were broad and did not fully take into account the satisfaction of more specific preliminary needs.

The assistance provided by the United Nations specialized agencies was useful because of its flexible, non-conditional and universal nature, but its absolute value was extremely small in comparison with other sources of assistance. Thus, in the immediate term, other areas of development planning took precedence over the preparation of a country strategy note.

It would be counterproductive to pressure United Nations agencies to adopt a fixed number of country strategy notes by a certain deadline, for the exercise must take place in the context of cooperation between the agencies and recipient Governments. Some countries, including Sri Lanka, had only

recently completed the demanding process of adopting country programmes under the UNDP fifth programming cycle. She wondered whether those country programmes could constitute an alternative to the country strategy note for the time being.

Ms. VOLKOFF (Canada), noting the dissatisfaction expressed by Executive Boards about automatic approval of country programmes, said that the current session provided an opportunity to experiment and consider improvements. Perhaps JCGP could be encouraged to select country programmes at a similar stage of elaboration for joint review. Certain country programmes might even be submitted to a governing body or to joint governing bodies for review prior to completion. The appropriateness of rolling country programmes could also be contemplated. Initially, JCGP must assess the potential of the country programme process and make recommendations. In conclusion, perhaps delegations might wish to address their questions, particularly questions such as those raised by the representative of Sri Lanka, to other delegations as well as to the representatives of the programmes, funds and agencies.

Mrs. WYRSCH (Observer for Switzerland) said that country strategy notes could help Governments make better use of the limited United Nations system, in that they would facilitate identification of how resources were currently being used. Analyses of current resources utilization should be provided by the United Nations system at the field level. As a further benefit, the United Nations system would be able to improve its profile, which was often difficult to define in any specific country. The next triennial review exercise should determine the utility of the country strategy note to date. In that connection, the Council might benefit from hearing the views of resident coordinators with recent field experience.

Mrs. VASISHT (India) agreed that it would be useful to conduct a regional analysis before the next triennial policy review, bearing in mind the importance of a country-driven approach in operational activities for development without intrusive demands in terms of accountability, monitoring

and evaluation. As part of the preparations for the review, there was a particular need for an evaluation of national execution and for increased consultation among Member States on guidelines for the resident coordinator system and the role of the JCGP. With regard to the need for decentralization, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/199, she noted that a manual covering policies and procedures was being prepared, and in that connection there should be proper consultation with Member States. Decision-making at the field level should be subject to the direction of the host Government.

Ms. BRUN (Norway) said that the preparation of country strategy notes was time-consuming for all parties but that the notes provided a valuable tool as a framework for country programmes and a means of identifying major development issues and areas in which United Nations activities could make an important contribution. Efforts must, however, continue to increase the linkages between country strategy notes and country programmes. A question that needed to be addressed was where responsibility lay for ensuring such linkages and for making sure that the country strategy note addressed the main development issues in a particular country. There must be a central review mechanism, perhaps involving the resident coordinator.

Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) agreed that the question of the real impact of the country strategy note was fundamental in terms of planning by recipient countries and specialized agencies. The important point was to remember that the note was a means rather than an end, in which connection the Council should bear in mind the importance of short-term pragmatic and flexible planning instruments. Excessive reliance on strategic planning was misplaced. In fact, the country strategy note was only one element referred to in General Assembly resolution 47/199. Other factors of obvious importance included a programme-based approach, the role of the resident coordinator, the financial resources available and the planning capacity of the recipient country. Too much emphasis had been placed on the country strategy note, which was, after

all, only a document. What was needed was real coordination between agencies and leadership by the resident coordinator

Mr. LUNDBORG (Observer for Sweden) said that the country strategy note, in the preparation of which the specialized agencies had a role to play, offered an important means of improving coordination, since many studies had shown that there was fragmentation in the development activities of the United Nations system. JCGP should analyse programmes in preparation and assess how they could be integrated through the medium of the country strategy note. Such an exercise would generate valuable information for the triennial policy review. The note was, of course, only a means to the end of coordination, which was so important in dealing with problems requiring a multisectoral approach where limited resources were available.

Mr. OTUYELU (Nigeria) said that the aim of the country strategy note was to optimize the use of resources, which was becoming increasingly important. He agreed that it would be useful for resident coordinators to participate in the work of the Council, since they could provide valuable information on problems at the national level. The Council should view the country strategy note as a means of improving coordination and planning in support of national efforts.

Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) said that the two main issues were respect for the recipient country's wishes and the relevance of the country strategy note, which must have an impact in the real world. The country strategy note approach was not unique to the United Nations system; it had, for example, been employed by Australia in its bilateral planning, with positive results. The point was not simply to conduct an exercise in coordination but to achieve a real impact on programme delivery and to make activities more effective.

Mr. ALTESMAN (United Nations Children's Fund) agreed that a country-driven approach was essential, since projects without government ownership simply would not work. Strategies must interact with government objectives, and therefore the country strategy note itself must be country-

driven if Governments were to see it as a genuinely useful exercise. JCGP should review the question of linkages between country strategy notes and country programmes, as well as the question of structuring the work of the specialized agencies. It was important that the specialized agencies should be involved in the preparation of the country strategy note and in any review of United Nations system activities.

Mr. MADDHEUS (United Nations Development Programme), replying to the representative of India, said that JCGP was currently sponsoring a study of the different practices in national execution; the results of that study should be available as part of the 1995 triennial review. Secondly, UNDP would endorse the suggestion that resident coordinators should be present at sessions, on condition that the Council agreed to that proposal. Lastly, replying to the representative of Sri Lanka, he said that there was a dilemma at the country level in that, on the one hand, agencies had to implement the decisions of bodies such as the Economic and Social Council and their governing boards and strive to become more focused on programming, while on the other hand, they also had to respond to the genuine needs of the countries themselves, and in that sense they were sometimes best placed to fill gaps.

Mr. ANDO (United Nations Population Fund) endorsed the proposal of the representative of Canada to conduct a JCGP review of country programmes, considering it a stimulating suggestion that deserved further consideration.

Mr. HAEMMERLI (Chief, Operational Activities for Development Unit, Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that the country programme had been used as an alternative to the country strategy note where it had not been possible to prepare a country strategy note. However, the country programme process was a single-institution process and, unlike the country strategy note, did not cover the system-wide aspect. There were elements in the preparation of the country programme where a close collaborative effort with the country strategy note would benefit both approaches. With regard to the Canadian proposal for JCGP review, he pointed out that the resolutions already provided for linkages between the country

strategy note and the country programmes and for cluster-style reviews of country programmes. He agreed with the representative of Switzerland that the country strategy note provided better visibility to the United Nations system and helped to clarify the work of the Organization in a given country.

While he agreed that regional analysis was an interesting concept worthy of further study, he suggested that another way of grouping countries for the purpose of analysing the country strategy note might be on the basis of typology.

Lastly, with regard to the endorsement by the resident coordinator of the country programme, he said that while resident coordinators were asked through legislation to organize appropriate consultation and review processes at the country level, particularly during the early stages of preparation, endorsement by the resident coordinator would be inappropriate and would, in some instances, give rise to legal complications.

Mr. BOUCHER (World Bank), speaking on behalf of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), said that the country strategy note was a useful mechanism to enhance the consistency and discipline with which the United Nations system provided support at the country level. He agreed with previous speakers that the country strategy note must be government-owned, respond to national priorities and be implemented by strong governmental management. The World Bank and IMF offered consulting services to further the harmonization of the country strategy note and to introduce the broader resource framework in which government policies with the World Bank and IMF were being developed for country strategy notes.

Mr. RAMOUL (Observer for Algeria) endorsed the comments of the representatives of India, Brazil and Colombia regarding the need to adopt measures to ensure better efficiency and coordination of operational activities, particularly in the field. Bearing in mind the technical differences between implementation and execution of programmes and projects, he asked what was the attitude of the specialized agencies concerning national

execution, a concept which seemed ambiguous and lacking in a generally accepted definition.

Miss JANJUA (Pakistan) asked the specialized agencies, in connection with the preparations for the next triennial policy review, which provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/199 had been relevant to the work in the field. At the time when the country strategy note was first discussed, some delegations had expressed concern that it might introduce another bureaucratic layer to the field, creating problems for United Nations field representation and Governments which had to prepare additional documents; therefore she wondered whether the country strategy note had been successful in coordinating United Nations agencies in the field in the one country which had completed its country strategy note. Furthermore, she inquired whether the Executive Board of UNDP or that of UNICEF would be responsible for reviewing country strategy notes and whether the Economic and Social Council or the General Assembly would also play a role in reviewing country strategy notes. Lastly, her delegation believed that since JCGP was composed of agencies which provided funds to the specialized agencies, it should provide an overview in the review of country strategy notes.

Mr. SORENSEN (International Labour Organization) said that the country strategy note process had been devised as a remedy against the fragmentation of United Nations operational activities at the country level. Prior to General Assembly resolution 47/199, the International Labour Organization (ILO) had realized the need to define specific objectives at the country level on the basis of need. ILO continued to pursue that process systematically in all countries, and while problems of synchronization with the country strategy note did arise in certain countries, he believed the two exercises were mutually supportive. The specialized agencies should be seen as the technical arms of the funds and programmes that could assist in clarifying the priority issues to be addressed by the United Nations system with its technical and managerial capabilities.

Mr. HEIN (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), endorsing the views of the representatives of Colombia, Sri Lanka and India, said that it was the responsibility of Governments to take the initiative in the country strategy process, while the specialized agencies should play an advisory role and assist Governments in developing strategies by providing options for approaches. While it was easier for specialized agencies such as FAO, which had a field network of representatives, to provide such assistance, he believed that the smaller agencies could also make significant contributions at the field level. In reply to the representative of Algeria, he said that the attitude of FAO to national execution was positive. FAO was interested not in pursuing execution of projects but rather in providing technical assistance, advice and direct implementational services only where required.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.